

MEMORANDUM

TO: Mayor Carolyn Kirk
Sarah Garcia, Community Development Director
Stephen Winslow, Senior Project Manager

FROM: Liam O'Laughlin, Community Development Intern

RE: The North Gloucester Woods Study

DATE: August 19, 2010

Over the summer of 2010, the Community Development Department studied the North Gloucester woods. This study continued the work of the 1985 Dogtown Advisory Committee (DAC), which mapped and delineated Dogtown as far north as the Norton Tree Farm and Squam Road. The current study examined the unoccupied lands that extend north of this boundary up to where the woods give way to settlement, generally where High St, Leverett St, Bianchini Rd, Woodbury St, and others penetrate and dead-end at the northern edge of the woods. The purpose was to identify and analyze the City's interests in this unique area.

This narrative has three sections. Section 1 describes existing conditions of key trails. They are categorized as north-south and east-west routes. Included is information about access points, trail width, surfacing, and overgrowth, as well as natural and historic resources near each trail. Section 2 summarizes preliminary community values that are associated with the North Gloucester woods. Section 3 suggests steps to move this project forward.

We would like to thank everyone who contributed to this project, including: Noel Mann, member of the Open Space and Recreation Committee, Mark Carlotto, Dogtown and Geographic Information System (GIS) enthusiast, Dina Enos, former member of the 1985 Dogtown Advisory Committee, Larry Neal, Co-Chair of Rockport's Open Space and Recreation Committee, Marcia Siegel, member of Rockport's Rights of Way Committee and Open Space and Recreation Committee, Frank Wright, and Scott Andersen. A very special thanks to Ellen Carney, our GIS Specialist, and the Information Technology Department of the City of Gloucester. Staff support included: Sarah Garcia, Community Development Director, Stephen Winslow, Senior Project Manager, and Liam O'Laughlin, Community Development Intern.

Development of the Map

Prior to beginning GPS mapping, Community Development staff met with Noel Mann, who provided us with a hand-drawn map of North Gloucester trails and her own insights as to which ones were the most significant, both of which were invaluable to the process. With her help, we designated the widest trails as "fire roads" (since they were more of woods *roads* than *trails*, and were presumably the best option for fire-trucks and other emergency vehicles to access the woods).

Through discussion with volunteers who attended our meetings, we designated eight key access points to the North Gloucester woods, which are shown as white circles on the map.

Using these access points, Community Development Intern Liam O'Laughlin spent a number of days hiking through the North Gloucester woods with a GPS, taking waypoints approximately every twenty feet along the fire roads. This data was then uploaded to our Geographic Information System (GIS) software. These "fire roads" are shown in bright red on the map.

Mark Carlotto, a Dogtown and GIS enthusiast, provided us with a great deal of his own GPS trail data from his time in the North Gloucester woods, which are labeled as brown dotted-lines on the map. Additionally, he digitized old roads from a 1975 Gloucester zoning map and historic roads from John Mason's 1831 Cape Ann map, which are shown as blue and orange lines, respectively.

Also through discussion with the project's volunteers, we determined the boundaries for the *North Gloucester Woods Study Area*. We initially used the boundary between the R-40 and R-80 zoning districts. However, we then expanded it in a number of places to include other important parcels in North Gloucester.

Ellen Carney, our GIS Specialist, and the Information Technology Department of the City of Gloucester were invaluable to this project, with long hours spent on producing the wonderful map that is included in this report.

Section 1: Existing Conditions

1. Dennison & Revere Streets to Squam Hill

- *Description* – This is an East-West path that connects Gloucester to Rockport. The Gloucester end of the trail begins at the end of Dennison Street in Lanesville. After entering the woods, it leads almost directly east for several hundred yards before turning north and connecting with the trail that exits the eastern side of Norton Farm (off of Revere Street). Afterwards, it leads east once again along Squam Path, snaking north and south, until just before the Gloucester/Rockport line when it turns southeast at the four-way trail intersection northwest of Squam Road. After a short distance, the trail leads directly east for several hundred yards before reaching the gate at the end of Squam Road in Rockport.

- *Access*

- Access to the woods from Dennison Street is fairly easy. At the end of the street, the paved road turns into a wide dirt path. After approximately 100 ft, the path arrives at a clearly visible gate, which identifies the entrance to the woods. However, there are no designated parking spaces. The road becomes fairly narrow by the end, but there is enough room to park on the somewhat-overgrown shoulder. I briefly spoke with the property owner at the end of the street, during which time I identified myself as a city intern. He had no issue with me parking on the end of the street near

his house, although it is unclear if he and other neighbors would be concerned with non-city employees parking there.



Dennison St Access Point

- The Revere Street entrance cuts directly through the Norton Farm (Private), making it a less-than-ideal access point. There is an alternate path that bears directly south at the western edge of the Norton's yard, which converges with Dennison trail (off of Dennison St) and gives the option to loop around to the other side of Norton Farm and connect to Squam Path. However, the alternate entrance still requires traveling down the Norton's private road and passing fairly close to their house.



Alternate Revere Street Access Point
West Side of Norton Farm (View from Trail)

- *Trail Information* – The trail is at least five to six feet wide throughout most of the route. It is primarily a dry-dirt surface, although there were a number of muddy patches where it looked like rain may have gathered and formed large puddles in the middle of the trail. There is very little overgrowth.
- *Natural Resources* – A significant portion of the trail (most of the first-half) passes through the protected New England Forestry Foundation land.
- *Historic Resources* – These trails follow the route of two historic roads that bisected Gloucester and Rockport (*Road from Sandy Bay to Squam Meeting House through the Woods* and *to Baker's Mill*), as shown in John Mason's 1831 *Map of Gloucester, Cape Ann*. Also, near the Dennison Street entrance, there are a number of stone walls running alongside the path that may date back to Dogtown's early days.

2. Hickory Street (Plum Cove School) to Quarry Street

- *Description* – This is a North-South trail that connects two of North Gloucester's important access points, Hickory St. and Quarry St. Upon entering the woods off of Hickory St, the trail leads south/southeast, along the western side of Vernon's and Nelson's Quarries, until it combines with *Quarry St Extension* (which connects Quarry St and High St via the Natti's private road). It then shifts southwest for the last several hundred yards before reaching Quarry St.
- *Access*
 - The Hickory Street access point is located just past Plum Cove School. There is a clearly visible gate, located at the end of the street, which identifies the beginning of a well-defined trail. There is a decent-sized parking lot at the school. However, parking is not permitted there during the summer months and violators are subject to tickets or towing. Much of the rest of Hickory Street has "No Parking" signs as well.
 - The Quarry Street access point, identified by a white gate with orange writing, is easily visible. It is located several hundred yards onto the dirt-road section of Quarry Street. However, the gate says "No Trespassing or Parking – Fire Lane." There is also no parking allowed along the rest of Quarry St (at least the dirt/gravel section), making it difficult to access for anyone except bikers and local residents.
- *Trail Information* – This is a very well defined trail. It is at least six to seven feet across along most of it. It is a dry-dirt surface with some minor rocky sections. This is very little overgrowth.
- *Natural Resources* – This trail passes along two of North Gloucester's well-known quarries, *Vernon's* and *Nelson's*. These quarries have come under increasing public scrutiny recently as some local residents have been upset with "out-of-towners" coming in to use them.



Hickory St Access Point



Quarry St Access Point

- *Historic Resources* – In addition to their recreational value, these quarries also represent an important part of Cape Ann’s history, dating back to the 1800’s when granite from Gloucester and Rockport was shipped all over the world.

Side Note:

Over the course of the summer of 2010, there was rising concern from Gloucester residents surrounding the increased use of Lanesville’s quarries (specifically Vernon’s and Nelson’s), mostly by out-of-towners, often leaving the area trashed and resulting in at least one alcohol-fueled fight and other forms of rowdiness. According to the Gloucester Daily Times, this has led to parking bans along a number of the access streets in Lanesville, increased policing around these swimming holes, and a number of arrests of both locals and out-of-towners. Some residents are calling on the city to close off the quarries completely. However, others detest the increased police presence in Lanesville and wish to either keep the quarries completely open to public use, as has historically been the norm, or to find a community-based solution to the problems associated with the increased use of these spectacular natural resources. Assistance from National Park Service experts could provide the city with an outside perspective and invaluable experience as to how to go about reaching a solution to this controversial issue.

3. Leverett Street to High Street (Obstructed)

- *Description* – This is a North-South trail, beginning on Leverett Street and extending south toward High Street. There are two entrances to the woods from Leverett Street. Both exit the road to the west/southwest and converge along the southeastern edge of a nearby quarry. The trail then travels almost directly south for several hundred yards before it splits into two very narrow, overgrown trails, both leading towards High Street. However, after approximately 100-200 ft along each, the eastern path was obstructed by a stone wall defining the boundaries of a yard, while the western one led directly into another resident’s backyard.
- *Access* –
 - The first access point is somewhat difficult to find due to overgrowth, even using a map and GPS. However, the path begins between two properties, making it an ideal entrance to avoid trespassing.
 - The second entrance is about fifty yards further down the street and is easily identifiable due to the typical woods access point gate; however, there are a number of signs warning that it is private and advising would-be visitors to keep out. After identifying myself as a city intern, a resident who lived along the path just past the gate told me it was fine to use the trail and that the gate/signs were just there to keep dirt bikes and other motorized vehicles out.



First Leverett St Access Point

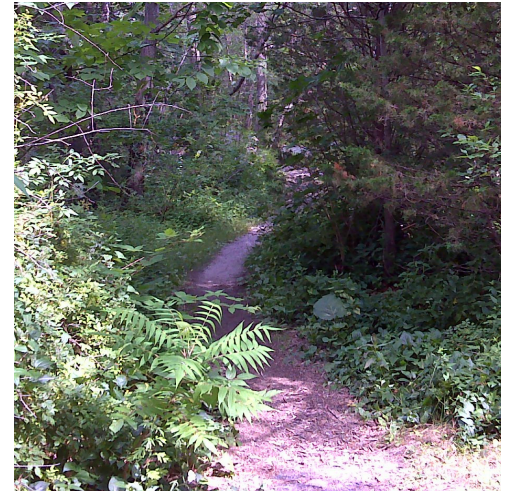
Second Leverett St Access Point



- *Trail Information* – The trail that leads into the woods from the first access point is very overgrown. For the first several hundred feet, the trail is only two to three feet wide. After that, the width expands to five or six feet. It is primarily a dirt/grassy surface. The trail leading away from the second access point is much larger and better defined. It is at least six to seven feet wide. The surface is primarily dirt/rocks, although there is a small asphalt section as well.
- *Natural Resources* – There is a medium-size, private quarry along this route, where both of the access point trails converge.
- *Historic Resources* – Once again, the quarry represents a significant part of Gloucester’s industrial history. Additionally, this trail use to be an important connection between Leverett St and High St, allowing resident’s who live in northwest Gloucester to access the High St area woods more easily and vice versa. Unfortunately, development has made this northern entrance to High St less than ideal, as one would have to cut directly through residents’ yards to access the woods.

4. Bianchini Road to Curtis Street, via “The Tracks.”

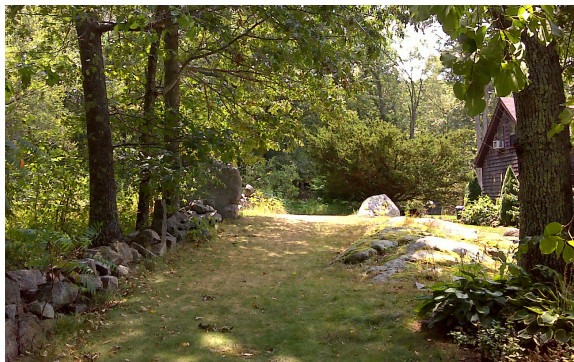
- *Description* – This is an East-West trail, with the western side beginning at the very end of Bianchini Rd, Gloucester, and extending east to Curtis St, Rockport. When entering from Bianchini Rd, most of the route is directly west-to-east, although shortly after the Gloucester/Rockport line it shifts northeast for several hundred yards.
- *Access* – The Bianchini Road access point is somewhat difficult to find, as it is a small trail at the very end of the road, next to a resident’s driveway, without a gate or any other markings. There is some space to park along the end of the street, however, it is not clear if these are legal spots or not. There are also several “No Trespassing” signs near the beginning of the trail.
- *Trail Information* – The trail begins as a narrow, somewhat-overgrown, dirt path, but expands significantly several hundred yards further down when it turns into “The Tracks,” just south of Woodbury St. Along this part of the trail the width is at least five to six feet. It is primarily a dry-dirt surface with very small rocks. It is very flat, making it an ideal route for biking. In the last several hundred yards before Curtis St, it becomes a little more overgrown in some places.
- *Natural Resources* – Near the Bianchini Rd entrance point, the trail passes by a very large private quarry (one of the largest in North Gloucester), which is located between Bianchini Rd and Woodbury St.
- *Historic Resources* – Much of the route follows “The Tracks,” a wide, well-defined trail that was originally a track used to haul granite from Cape Ann’s northern quarries to other locations on the island where it could be shipped from.



Bianchini Rd Access Point

5. Woodbury Street to Pigeon Hill Street, via Sheep's Pasture and Blueberry Lane

- *Description* – This trail begins at the southern tip of Woodbury St and proceeds southeast along “Sheep’s Pasture.” After about 500-600 yards it connects with Blueberry Ln, an offshoot of Pigeon Hill St that is about 200-300 yards long.
- *Access* – The entrance to the woods from Woodbury St runs along the edge of a resident’s yard. Nearer to the woods, there is a clearly visible dirt path. However, as it approaches the middle of the yard, the path ends and turns into grass. There are no designated parking spots in this area, although there is enough space for several cars along the shoulder of Woodbury St.
- *Trail Information* – Sheep’s Pasture is at least six to seven feet wide throughout the whole trail. There is very little overgrowth. The surface varied greatly, switching between dirt/muddy sections and long, rocky hills. There were a number of places with very deep (1-2 ft) tire tracks in the mud, presumably from a large truck.



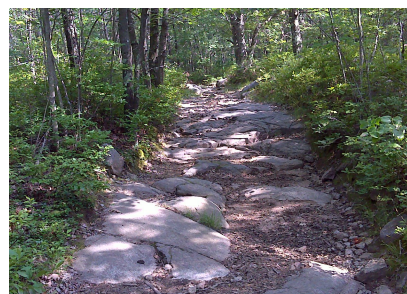
Woodbury St Access Point (From Road)



Woodbury St Access Point (From Woods)



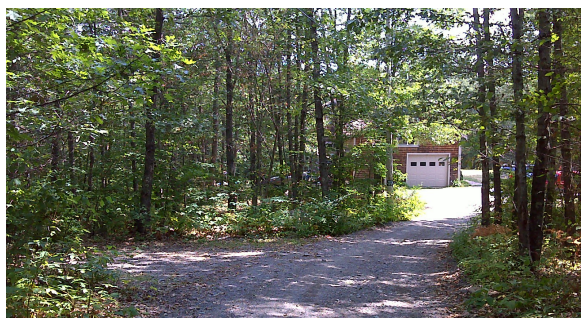
Deep Tire Tracks Along Sheep's Pasture



One of Several Long, Rocky Hills Along Sheep's Pasture

6. High Street to Dennison & Revere Streets or Squam Road

- *Description* – This trail begins at the eastern end of High St. It then travels south, snaking east and west along the way. After approximately three-quarters of a mile to one mile of bending back and forth it reaches a trail split. At this split, the western trail leads toward Revere St and Dennison St and the eastern one arrives at the four-way trail intersection northwest of Squam Rd.



Approaching High St Access Point
(near the last house on High St)

- *Access* – The High Street access point is at the very end of the road, on the edge of the driveway and through the yard of the last house. Just before the driveway, there is a small parking area on the left side of the road where at least two cars could fit. The woods are accessed by taking a sharp right upon entering the driveway, then cutting through the yard past their shed and skateboarding “half-pipe” (as seen in the second picture below). Despite the fact that it crosses through their property and that there were “No Trespassing” signs, it appears to be used by locals at least. I observed a jogger using this entrance while I was approaching High Street from the woods.
- *Trail Information* – The majority of this trail is at least six to seven feet wide. It is primarily a dry-dirt surface with grassy patches, although many sections are full of small to medium size rocks that are protruding from the ground. For the most part, there was not much overgrowth.
- *Natural Resources* – Near the High St entrance, the trail passes through several hundred yards of conservation land (parcels 164 55 and 163 15). After the trail split referenced in the trail description, the western trail enters New England Forestry Foundation land and remains within that boundary throughout most of the way to Revere St and Dennison St. The eastern trail, leading toward Squam Rd, travels along the edge of this protected land for approximately 200 yards.
- *Historic Resources* – After the trail split, both the eastern and western paths lead into the historic woodlots used by early settlers.



High St Access Point (Through Yard)

Section 2: Preliminary Community Values

There are a number of different values associated with the North Gloucester woods area. This preliminary list has been developed through discussions with Dogtown enthusiasts, Dogtown Advisory Committee members, members of various Rockport Committees, and internal discussions in the Community Development Department.

First are foremost, the North Gloucester woods serve important recreational needs of the community. They are a popular place, among residents and visitors alike, to hike, jog or run, mountain-bike, swim in the quarries, picnic, walk dogs, pick blueberries, take family outings, etc. Given that many of the access points and trails cross private land, these recreational opportunities are in danger of being lost if there is no solution developed to ensure long-term community access.

Second, and also of vital importance, is the concern of protecting access to the North Gloucester woods for public safety officials. To ensure that firemen, police, and paramedics can respond to emergency situations effectively, the city must protect the ability of emergency vehicles to access the woods through a number of various entrance points. Also, if trails are to be used as fire roads, they will have to meet basic access needs.

Third, this section of Gloucester is full of historical and cultural significance. Over the centuries, it has been used for farming and grazing, wood harvesting, granite quarrying, providing shortcuts across the island, and so forth. One of the city’s key priorities should be to ensure that any remnants of Gloucester’s historic past in this unique area are not lost to further development.

Section 3: Suggested Steps Going Forward

At this point, we have only had preliminary discussions of values with a small group of interested parties. As the project continues, we would like to encourage public participation by holding community meetings to determine which values are most important to Gloucester residents. Some may value conservation over recreation or vice versa, so it is important to gauge public support for different ideas and to strike a balance between competing values. We will also be looking to the public to provide us with their thoughts on the current study area boundaries and whether it should be expanded or contracted in any specific areas.

We are currently working with the town of Rockport and non-profit groups to seek assistance from the National Park Service's *Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program* (RTCA). If our project is chosen, we will receive technical assistance from NPS experts to facilitate discussions regarding community values, identify best practices for open space management and stewardship, navigate the planning stages, and convert ideas into policies and actions. We will also be looking to the NPS for advice on handling different levels of public demand, such as local use vs. use by out-of-towners. A prime example of why this is necessary is Gloucester's current quarry controversy (described on page 5).

Additionally, deed research for parcels in the study area must be carried out, as the city does not possess enough information on public access rights and lacks ownership information for some parcels. We have applied for a grant from the Community Preservation Committee to provide us with funding to carry out the investigation. This will help us to understand what land belongs to the public, private owners, and non-profit groups, and whether or not there is any public right to use the trails that pass through those parcels.